

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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R 271445Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7898
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMCONSUL DURBAN
AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PRETORIA 3133

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SF, PINS, PINT
SUBJECT: SOWETO POLICE CHIEF VISSER DISCUSSES JUNE 16

CONSULATE GENERAL JOHANNESBURG HAS FURNISHED THE FOLLOWING
INTERESTING REPORT ON A CONVERSATION WITH SOWETO POLICE CHIEF
JAN VISSER ON JUNE 20:

1. SUMMARY: SOWETO POLICE CHIEF JAN VISSER, IN CONFIDENTIAL
REMARKS TO CONOFF, STATED HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR DETENTION OF
SSRC LEADERSHIP BECAUSE SSRC PRESIDENT MATSISI WAS PREPARING TO
VIOLATE THEIR AGREEMENT FOR PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS. HE ALSO
OUTLINED HOW POLICE HAD TRIED TO RELY ON TEAR GAS TO PREEMPT
CONFRONTATIONS; HOW HE GENUINELY REGRETTED THAT SOME PEOPLE HAD
BEEN SHOT; HOW HE PLANNED TO TRACK DOWN "IRRESPONSIBLE THUGS" IN
THE POLICE FORCE WHO HAD THROWN TEAR GAS INTO HOUSES; AND HOW
KRUGER HAD FORCED RIOT POLICE HEAD KRIEL ON HIM AND HOW KRIEL
AND HIS MEN HAD NO UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT WAS GOING ON IN SOWETO.
VISSER ALSO REVEALED THAT THE TERRORIST ATTACK IN DOWNTOWN
JOHANNESBURG WAS CARRIED OUT BY THREE MEMBERS OF A BAND OF 10;
HOWEVER, THE OTHER SEVEN ARE STILL IN MOZAMBIQUE. FINALLY,
VISSER REVEALED PRIME MINISTER VORSTER HAS CREATED A CONFIDENTIAL
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COMMISSION TO LOOK INTO BLACK-WHITE RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA.
END SUMMARY.

2. IN THE AFTERMATH OF TENSIONS OVER SOWETO ANNIVERSARY
(JUNE 16), CONOFF DISCUSSED WITH BRIG. JAN VISSER, SOWETO POLICE
COMMANDER, CONDITIONS WHICH PRECEDED DISTURBANCES, POLICE
STRATEGY TO AVOID CONFRONTATIONS, THE ROLE OF THE SSRC, AND

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SECURITY SITUATION IN SOWETO UP TO JUNE 20. VISSER ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE HAD TRIED TO WORK OUT A SCENARIO FOR PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS WITH THE SOWETO STUDENTS' REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT HIS SOURCES OF INFORMATION REPEATEDLY CONFIRMED THAT SSRC PRESIDENT MONTSISI WAS NOT PLANNING ON FULFILLING HIS SIDE OF THE AGREEMENT. VISSER REVEALED THAT HIS SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON SSRC ACTIVITIES WERE GOOD, THAT HE KNEW MONTSISI'S INTENTIONS VIRTUALLY BEFORE ANYONE ELSE. VISSER STATED HE HAD TRIED TO WARN MONTSISI ON REPEATED OCCASIONS BOTH BY MEANS OF PERSONAL MESSAGES AND STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS NOT TO RENEGE ON THEIR AGREEMENT, BUT MONTSISI APPARENTLY BELIEVED THAT VISSER WAS NOT AWARE OF HIS INTENTIONS. VISSER ACKNOWLEDGED, THEREFORE, HE WAS FORCED TO FOLLOW KRUGER'S INCLINATIONS AND ORDER THE DETENTIONS OF MONTSISI AND THE ENTIRE SSRC LEADERSHIP AS A PREVENTATIVE MEASURE. ALTHOUGH HE SEEMS TO REGRET HAVING HAD TO DO SO. VISSER STATED THAT MONTSISI AND A FEW OTHERS WILL PROBABLY BE CHARGED BUT AT LEAST SOME OF THE 20 WILL BE RELEASED BECAUSE HE IS NOT INTERESTED IN DESTROYING SSRC. WITH MIXTURE OF PRIDE AND EMBARRASSMENT, VISSER REVEALED THAT HE HAS THOROUGHLY INFILTRATED THE STUDENT REP COUNCIL AND THAT ONE OF MONTSISI'S PRINCIPAL DEPUTIES WAS VISSER'S BEST INFORMER. VISSER EMPHASIZED HE ORDERED DETENTIONS ONLY BECAUSE HE FEARED THE POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE IN SOWETO WAS SO GREAT THAT HE COULD NOT IGNORE THE FACT THAT MONTSISI WAS WORKING ACTIVELY TO PROMOTE PLANS FOR CONFRONTATIONS.

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3. AS FOR POLICE TACTICS DURING THE DEMONSTRATIONS, VISSER STATED THAT HE HAD DEVISED MOST OF THE STRATEGIES INCLUDING THE USE OF TEAR GAS. HOWEVER, IT WAS NOT HIS IDEA TO FLOOD SOWETO WITH KRIEL'S RIOT POLICE. HE STATED HE WAS GENUINELY SORRY THAT SOME HAD BEEN WOUNDED BY POLICE GUNFIRE, GIVING THE DISTINCT IMPRESSION THAT HE DID NOT APPROVE OF THE FACT THAT SOME POLICE OFFICERS HAD USED THEIR WEAPONS. HE STATED THAT HE WAS RELIEVED THAT ALL WOUNDED SUFFERED WERE SUPERFICIAL AND THE ONLY VICTIM STILL IN THE HOSPITAL (SUFFERING FROM AN EYE WOUND) WOULD BE RELEASED SOON, WITH NO PERMANENT DAMAGE TO HIS SIGHT. AS TO THE CONTROVERSY ABOUT THE USE OF TEARGAS, VISSER ACCEPTED RESPONSIBILITY BUT STATED HE WAS VERY ANGRY WITH WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS "IRRESPONSIBLE THUGS" IN THE POLICE WHO HAD ABUSED THE PUBLIC TRUST, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO HAD FIRED TEARGAS INTO HOUSES. HE STATED HE WAS DETERMINED TO IDENTIFY THOSE POLICE WHO WERE GUILTY OF ABUSES AND DISCIPLINE THEM. HE SAID IT WAS UNFORTUNATE BUT HE WAS UNABLE TO PERSONALLY SUPERVISE ALL POLICE UNDER HIS COMMAND AND THE BEST HE COULD DO WAS TO DISCIPLINE THOSE GUILTY OF SUCH ABUSES. HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE USE OF TEARGAS HAD MINIMIZED CASUALTIES.

4. VISSER REVEALED THAT MINISTER OF JUSTICE KRUGER HAD

FORCED RIOT POLICE HEAD KRIEL AND HIS MEN FROM PRETORIA ONTO HIM (VISSER) AND THEY HAD PROVEN TO BE ANOTHER HEADACHE AS FAR AS KEEPING THE PEACE. HE SAID THAT KRIEL WAS AN IGNORANT MAN AND HIS MEN TOTALLY UNINFORMED AS TO THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF SOWETO, AND OFTEN VISSER FOUND HIMSELF TRYING TO CONTROL KRIEL AND THE RIOT POLICE.

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OF ADDITIONAL INTEREST, WHILE KRUGER WAS IN JOHANNESBURG, VISSER NOTED HE REFUSED TO COME TO SOWETO BECAUSE HE FELT IT WAS UNSAFE THERE. VISSER ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT THE POLITICAL CLIMATE OF SOWETO OVER THE 16TH WAS FAR MORE POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS THAN MOST PEOPLE REALIZED. HE WAS CLEARLY RELIEVED THAT THE PEOPLE OF SOWETO HAD REJECTED VIOLENCE AND FOR THE MOST PART SUPPORTED THE CALL FOR PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS. VISSER ESTIMATED A TINY PERCENTAGE OF THOSE INVOLVED IN SOWETO DEMONSTRATIONS HAD TRIED TO INCITE VIOLENCE BUT, HE EMPHASIZED, A VIOLENT ELEMENT ACTING AS A SPARK COULD HAVE PRODUCED TRAGEDY.

5. VISSER REVEALED, ASKING THAT IT BE KEPT MOST CONFIDENTIAL, THAT HE HAD MET WITH ALL SOWETO SCHOOL HEADMASTERS AND SCHOOL BOARD REPRESENTATIVES AS PART OF HIS EFFORTS TO KEEP DEMONSTRATIONS PEACEFUL AND ASKED THEM TO RELEASE ALL STUDENTS FROM SCHOOL ON THURSDAY AND FRIDAY, JUNE 16 AND 17. HE DID SO TO ALLOW THE STUDENTS TO MAKE THEIR OWN CHOICE ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN DEMONSTRATIONS WITHOUT FEAR OF INTIMIDATION. VISSER SAID THAT HE WANTED TO MINIMIZE SITUATIONS WHERE SMALL GROUPS OF ACTIVISTS COULD SHAME OTHER STUDENTS INTO TAKING TO THE STREETS. ALSO,

THE REASON THE POLICE UTILIZED TEARGAS TO SUCH AN EXTENT,
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INCLUDING THE CONTROVERSIAL POSITIONING OF TEARGAS BEHIND HOUSES,
WAS BECAUSE FOR THE FIRST TIME POLICE WERE COMING UNDER FIRE
FROM SLINGSHOTS AND ROCKS FROM BEHIND THE HOUSES AND TEARGAS
WAS INTENDED TO BREAK UP THE ATTACKS.

6. AS TO THE TERRORIST ATTACK IN DOWNTOWN JOHANNESBURG
INVOLVING SOVIET WEAPONS AND HAND GRENADES, VISSER ASSERTED
THAT MINISTER OF JUSTICE KRUGER HAD MADE INCORRECT AND PREMATURE
STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS. HE SAID THE TERRORIST ATTACKERS WERE
PART OF A BAND OF 10 ORIGINALLY TRAINED IN MOZAMBIQUE, RECEIVING
FURTHER "TRAINING" IN ANGOLA AND RETURNING TO MOZAMBIQUE.
VISSER AGREED THAT THE GROUP WAS, AT BEST, marginally trained. OF
THE 10, ONLY THREE CROSSED INTO SOUTH AFRICA WITH THE
OTHER SEVEN REMAINING IN MOZAMBIQUE. THE THREE WHO
CROSSED INTO SOUTH AFRICA WERE ON THEIR WAY TO SOWETO WHEN THEY
WERE DISCOVERED AND CHASED INTO AN INDUSTRIAL AREA OF JOHANNESBURG.
THE ATTACK ON THE WAREHOUSE WAS APPARENTLY BORNE OF FRUSTRATION
AT BEING DISCOVERED AND WAS NOT PLANNED. TWO OF THE THREE WERE
CAPTURED; THE OTHER REMAINS AT LARGE, ALTHOUGH POLICE RECOVERED
HIS WEAPON. VISSER REPEATED THAT OTHER SEVEN WERE STILL IN
MOZAMBIQUE AND HAVE NOT CROSSED INTO SOUTH AFRICA.

7. FINALLY VISSER REVEALED THAT PRIME MINISTER VORSTER HAS
CREATED A CONFIDENTIAL GOVERNMENT COMMISSION COMPOSED OF SOME
INDIVIDUALS CHARGED WITH INVESTIGATING THE FUTURE
OF BLACK-WHITE RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA. VISSER IS ONE OF THE
INDIVIDUALS APPOINTED TO THIS COMMISSION. ONLY OTHER NAME
REVEALED WAS TREURNICHT. VISSER STATED THAT THERE ARE NO BLACKS
ON THIS COMMISSION AND HE (VISSER) HAS WARNED THAT HE WILL
RESIGN IF NO BLACKS ARE APPOINTED. ONE CANDIDATE VISSER SUPPORTS
IS PERCY QOBOZA, EDITOR OF THE WORLD NEWSPAPER.

8. CONGEN COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THERE IS STILL DISTRUST
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OF THE POLICE, VISSER IS GAINING A REPUTATION IN BOTH BLACK AND
WHITE COMMUNITIES AS A FAIR MAN. BLACKS ARE
HAVING A HARD TIME OVERCOMING THEIR LONG-BRED FEAR AND
MISTRUST OF THE POLICE, AS WELL AS A TENDENCY TO LUMP
ALL POLICEMEN TOGETHER, BUT THINKING BLACKS SUCH AS
QOBOZA RESPECT VISSER, ALTHOUGH STILL CRITICIZING HIM
FROM TIME TO TIME. (NOTE: QOBOZA COMMENTED TO REPORTING
OFFICER IN PREVIOUS CONVERSATION THAT VISSER IS A MAN

HE CAN RESPECT.) VISSER SEEMS TO FEEL AN AMBIVALENCE ABOUT WORKING WITH THE SSRC. HE BOTH RESPECTS AND FEARS THEM--RESPECTING THEM AS A POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP FORCE WHO HAVE LEGITIMATE GRIEVANCES, YET THEY POST A CONTRADICTION IN THAT THEY THEORETICALLY THREATEN THE PEACE. THIS CONTRADICTION WAS NEVER SO CLEARLY ILLUSTRATED AS VISSER'S DILEMMA OVER THE 16TH OF JUNE.

9. EMBASSY COMMENT: VISSER'S CANDOR WITH THE CONGENOFF IS UNUSUAL AMONG HIGHER-LEVEL AFRIKANER MILITARY/POLICE OFFICIALS. ONLY IN THE CASE OF GEN. VAN DER BERGH DO WE HAVE COMPARABLE ACCESS. WE DO NOT KNOW WHY VISSER IS SO OPEN WITH US (E.G., A FACET OF HIS PERSONALITY, SOME SPECIAL AFFINITY TO THE US, OR CALCULATED PLAN TO USE US). WE SHALL NURTURE THIS CONTACT CAUTIOUSLY AND REQUEST DEPARTMENT TO PROTECT INFORMATION HE SUPPLIES. THE INFORMATION PROVIDED BY VISSER ON THE GROUP OF TEN TERRORISTS COINCIDES WITH THAT FURNISHED BY OTHER SOURCES. HIS REVELATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE FUTURE BLACK-WHITE RELATIONS IS THE FIRST TIME WE HAVE HEARD OF THIS DEVELOPMENT. WE WILL BE FOLLOWING UP TO SEE WHAT WE CAN LEARN ABOUT COMPOSITION, TERMS OF REFERENCE, SCHEDULE, ETC. BOWDLER

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Message Attributes

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TAGS: PINS, PINT, SF, SSRC, (VISSER, JAN)
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